News From Somewhere

By
Project Alphistia
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The Amish Example

I live in Champaign-Urbana in Central Illinois, about 2.5 hours south of Chicago. About 30 miles south of here is the small town of Arthur. Just outside of Arthur are several thousand Amish farmers.

The Amish are part of the Anabaptist denomination, a very loose federation of Protestants that includes Mennonites. They were founded in Switzerland in the early 18th century. Most of them lived in the German-speaking areas of Europe, with some Mennonites in the Netherlands.. Quite a lot of them emigrated in the 18th and 19th centuries due to persecution, and settled in North America. Some went further east into Russia (although most left there subsequently for North and South America, due to severe persecution in tsarist and Soviet times).

Most Amish are known for being very traditional (extremely so). By and large, they have not adopted technology beyond what was used around 1850. They do not use electricity, telephones, drive motor vehicles, or fly (they will however ride in cars, buses, trains, and ships). They do not have radios, televisions, any electric appliances, or computers in their homes. They educate their own children, but not beyond the eighth grade. They live apart from the larger society in rural areas, not in villages or towns, but within walking distance or a short buggy or bicycle ride from other Amish homesteads.

They are well-known as expert farmers and craftsmen. They make high quality custom-made furniture and cabinets, and are known for the excellence of their crops and the comfort foods they cook. Near Arthur they have their own food stores, and not just the Amish shop there.

They speak their own language based on 18th Century Low German. They refer to their American neighbors as “The English”. Their “cousins” in the larger Mennonite church often live in towns nearby and drive The Amish around, and help with some other “modern” tasks.

The Amish do not believe in insurance and are exempt from the Social Security system. Like the Mennonites they are pacifists, and this has caused persecution wherever they have settled, since they will not perform military service. Some Amish vote, usually for the most conservative candidates on the ballot (which created the highly odd situation of Amish people endorsing a creature like trump).

I’ve visited Arthur many times for some of their good food, and to observe how they live. It’s very interesting to see them on the edge of modern society, without giving up their own way of life. I could never believe in the things they do about religion and social issues, but I respect them for not conforming to the norms of American life (and getting away with it!)

The Amish barely know what Artificial Intelligence is, and since they do not use the internet or smartphones, they aren’t likely to integrate AI into their daily lives intentionally anytime soon. And that is something about

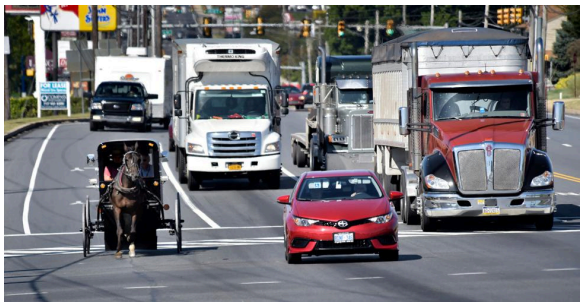
them that I like. They go their own way, without creating conflict with the larger society simply by not being a part of it. That is something that a future Alphistia could emulate.

Alphistia would reject the excesses of AI that have already developed. It isn't going to go away, although the current rapid advance of it is likely a bubble that is about to pop. This will cause a lot of disruption for everyone, and lots of money that will simply evaporate.

Like the Amish, Alphistians would go their own way. Alphistia would use electricity extensively, but not use petroleum or coal as fuel sources to generate it. There would be no internal-combustion vehicles in Alphistia, and it would not be a car-centric culture. Private electric cars would exist, but most people would get around by walking, using bikes, or riding on electric buses and trains.

Alphistia might choose to use a few AI applications, for example those that might advance health. But most of what AI promises is hollow and shallow, such as non-human made AI "art". Pursuing a massively disruptive destruction of livelihoods in the name of "progress" would not be Alphistia's national policy. That would be a pursuit of profits for the few, and misery for the many.

For critics who would say Alphistia is against "progress", we would reply: "We will decide for ourselves how we want to live". The example of the Amish shows that can be done, even inside a society that exerts enormous pressure to conform.



Apologies

Sorry that there has been a gap in issues these last few months. Since my return from my long travels down to Uruguay, it took some time to get back to my everyday routine. There aren't deadlines for me much anymore in retirement, an advantage. A negative of retirement is the advance of old age though! I will try to publish this newsletter more regularly now 🙂

Pushkin is Doing Fine

Pushkin is doing just fine. He was very well taken care of while I was away for 11 days in January and a week away when I visited Cincinnati in April.

It's been one year since he was diagnosed with diabetes (like me!) He is on a very expensive medication which is keeping him quite healthy. He's on a very nutritious diet too, all protein. So far, so good for Pushkin!

A Visit to Ursula in Alton Illinois

A few weeks ago on a blustery spring day, I went with a communalist friend in his electric car to Western Illinois. Our destination was Alton, an old Mississippi River town about 25 miles north of St. Louis.

We were headed to a residential area in Alton, where an old convent has been bought, with the goal of turning it eventually into a small intentional community. The convent was for many years where Ursuline nuns lived. They worked in local Catholic schools, a hospital, and a nearby orphanage. As the sisters passed away through the years, the facility was too expensive to keep up. The surviving nuns were moved to a consolidated facility in nearby St. Louis, and the property was put up for sale.

The former convent did not sell quickly. Actually about a decade passed before a buyer was found. In the meantime, the convent's condition declined, partly simply due to what normally happens when people no longer live somewhere and maintenance is stopped. On top of that, there was a lot of vandalism. Sadly, drug addicts helped themselves to whatever could be taken away: the copper, the wiring, the air conditioning and heating systems, fixtures of all kinds, kitchen equipment etc. The main building became a ruin, more or less.

This lowered the final selling price, and an organization called CATGO bought the property (their website can be accessed at : https://madcatco.org/

CATGO stands for Cultural, Agronomic, and Technological Community. Their goal is to create a community center, provide affordable housing (eventually), market gardens to produce some local food, and a training center for sustainable small industry, handicrafts, and tech. Some of these would generate profits that would be used to continue renovations and to develop projects for CATGO, while also helping local Alton residents.

My impression is that CATGO won't be a commune, but more of a rental cohousing-type place to live, and that most residents would be either local students, or people who work day-jobs in the St. Louis metro area, or work from home.

We met with the "guru" of the project, a young man named Donny. And we were given a very good tour by him of the old convent house and the rest of the property. In the photo included in this article, you can see it's partially wooded, with cleared areas that could have gardens and small workshops, and that's the Mighty Mississippi in the background. We met a few of the local people involved with creating CATGO at the convent. They were just lovely: enthusiastic, and welcoming.

A real advantage of being in the St. Louis area, is that part of it is NOT in the state of Missouri. MO is trumpland politically, although St. Louis itself is decidedly a progressive place. Illinois has not imposed the kinds of intrusive and oppressive laws at the state level that Missouri's local legislators have forced through since trump returned to DC in January 2025. And Illinois will likely remain solidly blue for the foreseeable future. For those repulsed by the far right policies that dominate the state of Missouri, a place like CATGO could be the right place to be to avoid being part of a repressive apparatus just over the state line.

The only part of the former convent which was not wrecked by vandals is the chapel. Probably because it was too difficult to cart away the marble altar and sanctuary furnishings, and no way to uninstall the gorgeous stained glass windows. Except for a few panes, the windows are intact. ("Thank the Lord!")

I hope to return to the CATGO project and see how things develop. The group members have already given the old convent a nickname: they call it “Ursula”, a tribute to the Ursuline nuns who lived there for so many years.

Last year I put together my 24 page booklet about a prototype Alphistian community set in Illinois too. It would be set up on a property GIVEN to Project Alphistia by do-gooders. It also would just happen to be the site of a former convent, in a rural area in Central Illinois, of just under 640 acres (one square mile). I called the book: Alphistia Small and Beautiful. That can be downloaded and read at:
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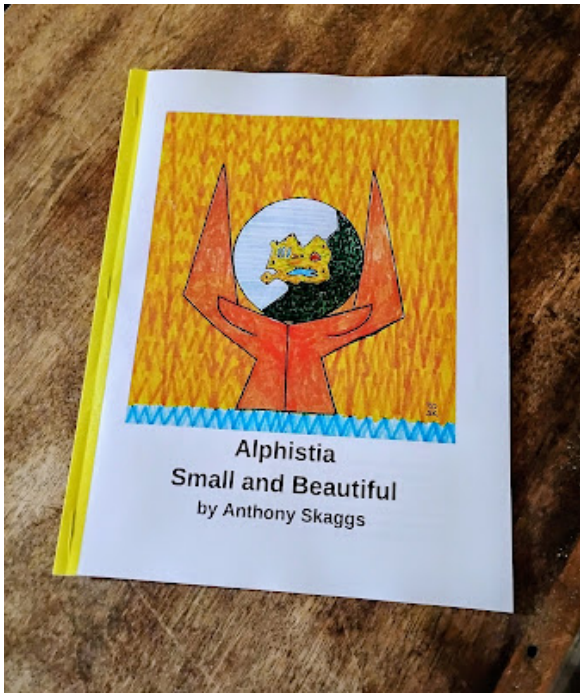
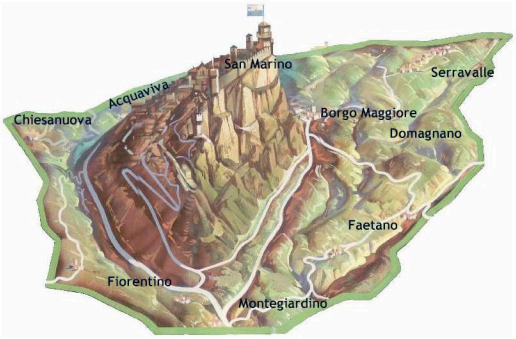


An Enclave Republic

If you happen to be in the central northeast of Italy, a nice place to visit is the Republic of San Marino. I have never been there myself, and perhaps I just won’t get there, but I have read about it for a long time. That’s because it is very small (only 24 square miles!) It is ancient, created in the fourth century as a monastery, and it has been an independent entity for a very long time.



San Marino is known as an enclave country. It is completely surrounded by Italy. There are only two other enclave nations in the world: Vatican City, surrounded completely by the city of Rome, in Italy. And the country of Lesotho in Africa, completely surrounded by South Africa.

Alphistia could easily be an enclave country too eventually. Often I think the place most likely for it to be would be Canada, in Northern British Columbia. It’s not possible to predict the future, but I definitely believe that national borders will be changing in the near future. A much more loose Canadian federation could result, with a small enclave nation like Alphistia tolerated, completely surrounded by British Columbia/Canada.

We shall see what the future holds!

Comments are always welcome:
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